Occupational Information Included in the *Handbook*

The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* is best used as a reference; it is not meant to be read from cover to cover. Instead, start by looking at the table of contents, where related occupations are grouped in clusters, or look in the alphabetical index in the back of the *Handbook* for specific occupations that interest you. For any occupation that sounds interesting, use the *Handbook* to learn about the type of work; working conditions; education and training requirements and advancement possibilities; earnings; job outlook; and related occupations. Each occupational statement, or description, in the *Handbook* follows a standard format, making it easier for you to compare occupations.

Two previous sections—Tomorrow's Jobs and Sources of Career Information—highlight the forces that are likely to determine employment opportunities in industries and occupations through the year 2010, and indicate where to obtain additional information. This section is an overview of how the occupational statements are organized. It highlights information presented in each section of a *Handbook* statement, gives examples of specific occupations in some cases, and offers some hints on how to interpret the information provided.

Unless otherwise noted, the source of employment and earnings data presented in the *Handbook* is the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Nearly all *Handbook* statements cite employment and earnings data from the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) survey. Some statements include data from outside sources. OES data may be used to compare earnings among occupations; however, outside data may not be used in this manner because characteristics of these data vary widely.

About those numbers at the beginning of each statement

The numbers in parentheses that appear just below the title of every detailed occupational statement are from the Occupational Information Network (O*NET)—a system used by State employment service offices to classify applicants and job openings, and by some career information centers and libraries to file occupational information.

Occupational Information Network Coverage, a section beginning on page 609, cross-references O*NET codes to occupations covered in the *Handbook*. O*NET codes are based on the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system.

Significant Points

This section highlights key occupational characteristics.

Nature of the Work

This section discusses what workers do. Individual job duties may vary by industry or employer. For instance, workers in larger firms tend to be more specialized whereas those in smaller firms often have a wider variety of duties. Most occupations have several levels of skills and responsibilities through which workers may progress. Beginners may start as trainees performing routine tasks under close supervision. Experienced workers usually undertake more difficult tasks and are expected to perform with less supervision.

The influence of technological advancements on the way work is done is mentioned. For example, the Internet allows purchasers to acquire supplies with a click of the mouse, saving time and money. This section of *Handbook* statements also discusses emerging specialties. For instance, webmasters—who are responsible for all technical aspects involved in operating a website—comprise a specialty within systems analysts, computer scientists, and database administrators.

Working Conditions

This section identifies the typical hours worked, the workplace environment, physical activities and susceptibility to injury, special equipment, and the extent of travel required. In many occupations, people work regular business hours—40 hours a week, Monday through Friday—but many do not. For example, waiters and waitresses often work evenings and weekends.

The work setting can range from a hospital, to a mall, to an off-shore oil rig. Truckdrivers might be susceptible to injury, while paramedics have high job-related stress. Semiconductor processors may wear protective clothing or equipment, some construction laborers do physically demanding work, and top executives may travel frequently.

Employment

This section reports the number of jobs the occupation provided in 2000 and the key industries where these jobs are found. When significant, the geographic distribution of jobs and the proportion of part-time (less than 35 hours a week) and self-employed workers in the occupation are mentioned. Self-employed workers accounted for nearly eight percent of the work force in 2000; however, they were concentrated in a small number of occupations, such as farmers and ranchers, childcare workers, lawyers, health practitioners, and the construction trades.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

After knowing what a job is all about, it is important to understand how to train for it. This section describes the most significant sources of education and training, including the education or training preferred by employers, the typical length of training, and advancement possibilities. Job skills sometimes are acquired through high school, informal on-the-job training, formal training (including apprenticeships), the U.S. Armed Forces, home study, hobbies, or previous work experience. For example, sales experience is particularly important for many sales jobs. Many professional jobs, on the other hand, require formal postsecondary education—postsecondary vocational or technical training, or college, postgraduate, or professional education.

In addition to training requirements, the *Handbook* also mentions desirable skills, aptitudes, and personal characteristics. For some entry-level jobs, personal characteristics are more important than formal training. Employers generally seek people who read, write, and speak well; compute accurately; think logically; learn quickly; get along with others; and demonstrate dependability.

Some occupations require certification or licensing to enter the field, to advance, or to practice independently. Certification

Key phrases in the *Handbook*

This box explains how to interpret the key phrases used to describe projected changes in employment. It also explains the terms used to describe the relationship between the number of job openings and the number of job seekers. The descriptions of this relationship in a particular occupation reflects the knowledge and judgment of economists in the Bureau's Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

Changing employment between 2000 and 2010

If the statement reads:	Employment is projected to:
Grow much faster than average	increase 36 percent or more
Grow faster than average	increase 21 to 35 percent
Grow about as fast as average	increase 10 to 20 percent
Grow more slowly than average	increase 3 to 9 percent
Little or no change	increase 0 to 2 percent
Decline	decrease 1 percent or more

Opportunities and competition for jobs

If the statement reads:	Job openings compared to job seekers may be:
Very good to excellent opportunities	More numerous
Good or favorable opportunities	In rough balance
May face or can expect keen competition	Fewer

or licensing generally involves completing courses and passing examinations. Many occupations increasingly have continuing education or skill improvement requirements to keep up with the changing economy or to improve advancement opportunities.

Job Outlook

In planning for the future, it is important to consider potential job opportunities. This section describes the factors that will result in growth or decline in the number of jobs. In some cases, the *Handbook* mentions that an occupation is likely to provide numerous job openings or relatively few openings. Occupations which are large and have high turnover, such as food and beverage serving occupations, generally provide the most job openings—reflecting the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or stop working.

Some *Handbook* statements discuss the relationship between the number of job seekers and job openings. In some occupations, there is a rough balance between job seekers and job openings, resulting in good opportunities. In some occupations, employers may report difficulty finding qualified applicants, resulting in excellent job opportunities. Other occupations are characterized by a surplus of applicants, leading to keen competition for jobs. Limited training facilities, salary regulations, or undesirable aspects of the work—as in the case of private household workers—can result in an insufficient number of entrants to fill all job openings. On the other hand, glamorous or potentially high paying occupations, such as actors or musicians, generally have surpluses of job seekers. Variation in job opportunities by industry, size of firm, or geographic location also may be discussed. Even in crowded fields, job openings do exist. Good students or well-qualified individuals should not be deterred from undertaking training or seeking entry.

Susceptibility to layoffs due to imports, slowdowns in economic activity, technological advancements, or budget cuts also are addressed in this section. For example, employment of construction trades workers is sensitive to slowdowns in construction activity, while employment of government workers is sensitive to budget cuts.

Earnings

This section discusses typical earnings and how workers are compensated—annual salaries, hourly wages, commissions, piece rates, tips, or bonuses. Within every occupation, earnings vary by experience, responsibility, performance, tenure, and geographic area. Earnings data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and, in some cases, from outside sources are included. Data may cover the entire occupation or a specific group within the occupation.

Benefits account for a significant portion of total compensation costs to employers. Benefits such as paid vacation, health insurance, and sick leave may not be mentioned because they are so widespread. Though not as common as traditional benefits, employers may offer flexible hours and profit-sharing plans to attract and retain highly qualified workers. Less common benefits also include childcare, tuition for dependents, housing assistance, summers off, and free or discounted merchandise or services.

Related Occupations

Occupations involving similar duties, skills, interests, education, and training are listed.

Sources of Additional Information

No single publication can completely describe all aspects of an occupation. Thus, the *Handbook* lists mailing addresses for associations, government agencies, unions, and other organizations that can provide occupational information. In some cases, tollfree phone numbers and Internet addresses also are listed. Free or relatively inexpensive publications offering more information may be mentioned; some of these also may be available in libraries, school career centers, guidance offices, or on the Internet.

For additional sources of information, also read the earlier chapter, Sources of Career Information.